

Statement by Amb. Karl F. Inderfurth
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee
February 26, 2009
“Building a Strategic Partnership: U.S. – India
Relations in the Wake of Mumbai”

Chairman Ackerman, Ranking Member Burton, Members of the Committee:

Mr. Chairman, you and I had the privilege of joining President Bill Clinton on his five-day visit to India in March 2000. Little did we know then that today that visit is seen as a “turning point” in U.S. -India relations. After decades of being “estranged democracies,” the United States and India have entered a new era that can best be described as “engaged democracies.”

It is truly amazing just how far the U.S. -India relationship has come in less than a decade. This remarkable transformation in relations, started under Clinton, was then accelerated under President George W. Bush and is now set to continue its positive, upward trajectory under President Barack Obama.

This transformation has been an excellent example of policy continuity and bipartisanship in U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, in each case the incumbent U.S. president found a willing and able Indian prime minister to partner with in this truly joint endeavor – from Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Manmohan Singh. I am confident this will continue to be the case after India holds its national elections later this year.

The question before us today is how should the new administration proceed to expand this new strategic partnership? Following final approval of the landmark U.S. -India civilian nuclear agreement, we certainly do not want to lose momentum in strengthening our newfound ties. India is a rising global power for the 21st century. We are already there and intend to remain one. As two of the world’s great, multi-ethnic democracies, we need to work together.

Clearly this effort should be broad-based, befitting the wide range of bilateral, regional, and global interests shared by the two countries. Moreover, it should be ambitious, building on the foundation laid over the past several years. The following seven-point engagement agenda should therefore be considered.

I should mention that this agenda is derived from two longer pieces I have written on this subject -- a chapter on “U.S. -India Relations” for The Asia Foundation’s recent publication entitled *America’s Role in Asia* and an article with Bruce Riedel of the Brookings Institution entitled “Continuity In Change” that appears in the current issue of

the Indian journal *India and Global Affairs*. I ask that both of these be included in the record of this hearing.

Seven-point agenda

First, strengthen strategic ties. A strong India is important for balance of power purposes in Asia and for providing stability in the strategically important Indian Ocean littoral area. India is in a position to safeguard sea-lanes that are used to transport more than half the world's oil and gas. The navies of the United States and India have begun to conduct joint exercises aimed against threats to maritime commerce, including piracy.

There has been a quantum jump in U.S. -India defense ties in the past several years — with joint military exercises, the signing of a 10-year defense framework agreement, and increased interest in defense procurement and collaboration between defense industries. These ties should be accelerated.

Another arena for greater strategic cooperation is in counter-terrorism, the importance of which was tragically underscored by the terrorist attack on Mumbai last November. India has been a target of terrorist attacks longer than the United States. We face common forces of extremism in today's world. Expanding counter-terrorism cooperation requires increased information sharing, building tighter liaison bonds between U.S. and Indian intelligence and security services, and assisting India improve its counterterrorism capabilities.

Second, address regional challenges. Another area for greater collaboration should be at the regional level, in the subcontinent itself. Both India and the United States want a South Asia that is prosperous, stable and democratic. Throughout the region these goals are currently at risk.

At the top of this collaboration must be Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both countries are facing serious internal challenges that pose grave threats to the states themselves, the region and beyond. The appointment by President Obama and Secretary Clinton of Richard Holbrooke as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan is clear recognition of the highest national security priority these countries have for the new administration. The recent visit of Ambassador Holbrooke to New Delhi demonstrates that the United States intends to work closely with India, as a partner, to pursue our shared interest in security and stability in the region.

Third, realize economic potential. Underpinning the strategic partnership should be a concerted effort to reap the full economic potential of the U.S. -India relationship. Steps need to be taken to deepen commercial ties, identify and remove impediments on both sides (still far too many), and clear the way for a new era of trade cooperation and investment. Deeper economic ties will also have the advantage of providing needed ballast in the overall relationship when political differences arise, as they surely will.

Fourth, pursue an expanded nuclear agenda. It has long been a goal of the United States to engage India as a partner in global efforts to control the spread of nuclear weapons. I believe the successful conclusion of the U.S. - India civilian nuclear agreement opens the door to an even broader nuclear agenda that the United States and India could pursue, including greater cooperation to prevent nuclear and WMD proliferation and steps to move toward a “nuclear free world,” an aspiration both President Obama and Prime Minister Singh have endorsed.

Fifth, support India’s United Nations bid. Enhanced U.S. -India cooperation should also extend to the institutions of global governance. The United States should publicly support India’s bid for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council and work actively with India (and others) to accomplish the goal of Security Council expansion. With its thriving democracy, its billion plus population, its expanding economy, and its longstanding contributions to U.N. peacekeeping, the case for a permanent Indian seat has never been stronger.

Sixth, promote a cooperative triangle. Along with the much-improved U.S. -India relationship has come questions about the underlying motivations for this new direction in American foreign policy, specifically whether it represents a hedge by Washington against a rising China, India’s most consequential neighbor. These manipulative temptations should be resisted. Strengthened U.S. ties with India have their own strategic logic and imperatives and should not be part of a China containment strategy, something Indian officials would strongly oppose.

Instead, the task for all three is to manage ties as a cooperative — not a competitive — triangle. One way to further a closer, cooperative relationship between the United States (and the leading industrialized nations) and India and China would be to make these two global powers formal members of an expanded Group of Eight. Another would be to pursue initiatives in three critical areas that the three countries must all address and play a major role: energy, climate change and international health. Secretary Clinton’s recent visit to Beijing opened the door to this expanded agenda with the Chinese. It should also be pursued in her first trip to New Delhi.

Seventh, and finally, we should “dream big.” In a letter send to Senator Obama before his election, an Asia Society Task Force on India proposed that America and India should widen its collaborative focus to include the range of global issues facing the world today. “We should dream big,” said the task force, “establishing visionary goals, and identify where our cooperation can change the world – for example, tackling AIDS in Africa through the combined strength of our scientists, pharmaceutical industries, and public health experts; or pursuing new solutions for agriculture, through research as well as micro insurance innovations; we could even focus our expert policy, finance, and research communities on solutions for water scarcity, a looming problem for us all.”

“Dream Big”

“Dream big.” That should be the touchstone for the next stage in U.S. - India relations, not only for our governments, but also for the equally powerful expansion of our private sectors and people-to-people ties that are taking place.

Indeed as the recent space collaboration between the two countries on India’s highly successful lunar mission demonstrates, even the old expression “the sky’s the limit” should no longer apply to the possibilities that exist for what the United States and India can do together in the 21st century.

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